



## WC02 - Academic Freedom Policy

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## Introduction

Westerfield College is committed to fostering an environment that promotes intellectual inquiry, critical thinking, and free exchange of ideas. The Academic Freedom Policy ensures that faculty, students, and staff have the freedom to pursue knowledge, express thoughts, and engage in scholarly activities without undue constraint or fear of censorship.

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

1. Safeguarding academic freedom is essential to the pursuit of knowledge and truth.
2. Protect faculty, students, and staff from censorship and undue external influence.
3. Foster an environment conducive to open inquiry, critical thinking, and creative expression.
4. Promote intellectual diversity and inclusivity.
5. Uphold the institution's commitment to academic excellence and integrity.

## Scope

This policy applies to all Westerfield College community members, including:

1. Faculty
2. Students
3. Staff (academic and administrative).
4. Research and scholarly activities.
5. Teaching and learning environments.

## Principles

This policy is guided by the following principles:

1. Freedom of inquiry and expression.
2. Protection from censorship and external influence.
3. Intellectual diversity and inclusivity.
4. Academic integrity and responsibility.
5. Respect for diverse perspectives and opinions.

## This policy addresses:

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1. Freedom of research
2. Protection of intellectual property
3. Classroom expression and discussion
4. Extramural speech and public engagement
5. Institutional neutrality and autonomy

## Procedure

Academic freedom refers to the freedom of a college to set its intellectual priorities without undue interference from outside authorities and the freedom of students and faculty to promote wide-ranging discussion of intellectual, academic, and moral concerns by teaching, studying, writing, speaking, and pursuing knowledge, inquiry and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure. We affirm the freedom, of course, lecturers to inquire into any subject that evokes their intellectual concern; to critique or advocate for change of social, academic and institutional norms and received wisdom; to present their findings to their students, colleagues, and others without control or censorship; and to teach in the manner they consider professionally appropriate. It affirms the right of students to study subjects that concern them, form their conclusions, and express their own opinions.

Academic freedom, free study and ordered discussion in the classroom are promoted by the obligation to teach and study the stated curriculum professionally. Academic freedom is not a license for lecturers to ignore the teaching priorities of the institution or the ordinary standards of academic discourse in their field.

## Academic Freedom in the Classroom

In class, students and lecturers are responsible for staying relevant to the course curriculum and respectful of time limitations. Similarly, academic freedom is furthered by the requirements that lecturers and students follow the norms of orderly debate, civility and mutual respect and it is not a justification for students or lecturers to abuse others.

Westerfield College values academic freedom of speech and expression; and encourages diverse viewpoints in an environment where everyone is treated with civility and respect. Academic freedom

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thrives in a class environment in which students and faculty alike can engage in a respectful exchange of ideas, even when they passionately disagree.

In the classroom, lecturers and students alike are free to share a wide range of viewpoints in accord with standards of scholarly inquiry and relevance to the topic at hand. We protect the rights of all members of our community to challenge the views of another, engage in scholarly debate, and express their own views without fear of punishment, censorship, or retaliation.

Please note that violations of the College Code of Conduct are separate and distinct from academic freedom. Conduct that violates the College Code of Conduct is not protected by academic freedom and shall be addressed according to college policies and procedures.

### **Officers to enforce Academic Freedom**

Course lecturers and Pathway Leaders have the major responsibility to establish conditions that protect and encourage all students in their learning, teaching, and research activities. Such conditions include, for example: free inquiry and exchange of ideas; the right to critically examine, present, and discuss controversial material relevant to a course of instruction; the opportunity and obligation to encounter and critically consider challenging ideas or understandings of relevant course material; enjoyment of freedom of expression; and the right to be judged by faculty following fair procedures solely based on the students' academic performance and conduct.

The college is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters and provides all members of the school community the broadest possible freedom to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. All members of the school community are free to express their ideas and viewpoints and engage in scholarly debate. Because the college is committed to free and open inquiry in all matters, it guarantees all members of the school community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn. Except insofar as limitations on that freedom are necessary to the functioning of the college, we fully respect and support the freedom of all members of the college community "to discuss any problem that presents itself."

However, academic freedom is not a license to ignore the norms that make freedom of inquiry possible, including a learning environment that is free of racial, ethnic and similar discrimination, harassment, or retaliation.

All members of the school community are expected to participate in an inclusive academic environment that is built on civil discourse and fosters mutual respect, promotes equality, and celebrates diversity.

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Students, lecturers, and faculty shall be accountable for their words and actions, and shall not engage in discriminatory, harassing, intimidating, or retaliatory behavior of any kind. Any speech that subjects another to harassment, intimidation, a hostile work or learning environment, discrimination, or retaliation based upon one's membership of a protected class is a violation of the College's Code of Conduct, is strictly prohibited, and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including suspension and/or expulsion from the college.

Course lecturers are expected to conduct themselves professionally and treat all members of the school community with civility and respect. Speech that is not germane to the subject of the course of instruction; that violates the rights of others, such as libel, slander, harassment, or threats; that infringes on legally protected privacy or confidentiality interests; that directly impedes college activities in a severe and/or pervasive manner, or that intentionally promotes hate of individuals or groups is not permitted.

Course lecturers are free to express their views in any form of communication both on/and off campus without fear of sanction unless the speech (1) substantially impairs the rights of others, or (2) demonstrates that they are ignorant, incompetent, or dishonest in their fields of discipline or expertise. Academic freedom does not give students or faculty the right to ignore college regulations.

Furthermore, speech and expressions made by lecturers that present falsehoods to students as a fundamental truth, whether in or outside of the classroom, are not protected under this policy.

## Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Academic Board unless there are changes that necessitate an earlier review.

## Version History

No	Revised on	Version	Changes	Approved by	Date of Approval	Revised by
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